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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000137

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY'S ARMENIAN PATRIARCH ON THE GENOCIDE
RESOLUTION, NATIONALISM

REF: 06 ISTANBUL 596

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a February 8 meeting with EUR DAS Matthew Bryza, Armenian Patriarch for Istanbul and all of Turkey Mesrob II (please protect) and who asked not to be quoted on this point, said he feared that passage of the Armenian genocide resolution (H.R. 106) could lead to "violent backlash" against Armenians in Turkey. Mesrob also said the "disaster of 1915 should be examined on separate platforms by politicians, historians, diplomats, and sociologists. This would be very helpful in terms of creating empathy and understanding, rather than enmity." End summary.

¶2. (C) On the question of the pending resolution, Mesrob referred to the 260 articles that day in the national press commenting and reporting on the Dink murder. Turkish Armenians were intimidated by all the attention. Armenians' security, he said, would be improved with a much lower profile. The response to the Dink tragedy had been positive for a couple of days at the time of the funeral; now there was a strong, nationalist backlash. Armenians felt they were in the spotlight. It had been leftists in the funeral parade who shouted, "We are all Armenians!" Now, the community felt isolated. The patriarch noted an historical parallel in history when Armenians in Turkey had been given arms and told to rebel, only to be left with the aftermath.

¶3. (C) Particularly in this atmosphere the U.S. Congress' Armenian genocide resolution would not help. Emphasizing his request not to be quoted on this point, he stated that passage of the resolution could lead to a "violent backlash" against the community. Mesrob told Bryza he instead encouraged public use of his April 2006 address at Kayseri University where he urged review and translation of untapped primary sources as well as mutual respect leading to dialogue. (Text faxed to EUR/SE.) The Patriarch had also said in his speech at Kayseri University, "Turks and Armenians must break out of the straitjacket of exclusive nationalism and racism. Otherwise...the results are always bloody wars, tears, and hate campaigns. Instead of nationalism and racism, it is much more in line with our religious and ethical values to practice a love and appreciation for our national cultures."

¶4. (C) Mesrob summarized his hope on the subject, saying healing would come to the community if the government could say it was sorry. Even the Nationalist Action Party's (MHP's) extreme nationalist founder, Alparslan Turkes, came close, he claimed, contacting the president of Armenia some four times. If Turkey could somehow acknowledge that they helped cause these sufferings, "I believe that will be

enough," he stated.

15. (C) DAS Bryza also asked the patriarch about progress in the community's efforts to open an institution of higher learning for Armenians in Turkey and how re-opening Halki Seminary might affect these efforts. Without responding directly to the possibility of Halki opening, Mesrob said he was meeting with NSC Secretary General Yigit Alpogan in the next few days and hoped for a "universal" resolution to the need for minority community higher education. As previously noted (reftel), the solution envisioned a faculty at Istanbul University offering seminary courses as well as minority language classes. Each minority, including the Jewish community, would have its own subunit in the faculty. Practical instruction in the liturgy would be taught at the respective places of worship. Mesrob said this solution would also further intercommunal dialogue by making courses in Christian theology available to interested Turkish Muslim students. Mesrob was keen to find a solution before possible passage of a resolution, which he realized could derail this effort. "My community is not a friend of the resolution. It won't make life easy."

16. (C) Comment. By nature, the Patriarch is inclined to take the high road in defending his flock and the community; circumstances of the Armenian minority that number less than one in one thousand Turks make it imperative that he shape his public message with care. For Mesrob, there is continuity from the Ottoman into the republican government of Turkey where, for successive generations, minorities have carried the burden of their initially de jure and now de facto second class citizenship. End comment.

17. (U) This cable was cleared by EUR DAS Matthew Bryza.

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